



Devotees parade through city streets in a colourful procession Thursday to observe Eid-e-MiladunNabi, the birth and death anniversary of Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (PBUH).

Extortionists murder 4 in Sirajganj

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sirajganj

Four people, including a woman and her son, were killed by a gang of extortionists at village Kaliakoir in Ullapara upazila on Wednesday night.

The dead were identified as Noorjan Begum, 55, her son Nurul Islam, 40, Altaf Hossain Fakir, 70, and Manik, 32.

Police and local people said the extortionists wrote a letter to Mahila Begum, widow of Ibrahim of the village on May 12 demanding Tk 1 lakh. But Mahila refused to give in to their demand.

The gang, numbering seven stormed into the house at midnight on Wednesday and started beating Mahila and her family members.

As the inmates of the house cried for help, their neighbours rushed to the spot and encircled the house. Sensing presence of the neighbours, the extortionists, all were in burqa, came out of the house and attacked the villagers with lethal weapons, leaving Noorjan Begum, her son Nurul Islam, Altaf Fakir and Manik dead.

Police arrested a man named Tandu Mia, 35, of Kaliakoir village Thursday evening in connection with the murder.

Senior police officials, including the additional DIG, Rajshah, visited the spot. Police believe the attackers are the members of an outlawed party.

Police have been deployed at the village following the incident.

Wheels within wheels

Rush for JS committees just to fulfil constitutional obligation?

NAZRUL ISLAM

Opposition lawmakers decried 'unlawful' formation of parliamentary standing committees while parliament officials privately termed it a 'whimsical move' by the ruling alliance.

"They are doing whatever they like. Even they don't hesitate to violate the constitution and the Rules of Procedure," said Opposition Chief Whip Abdus Shahid.

His voice was echoed by a parliament official. "Parliamentary democracy is supposed to be dictated by the constitution, parliamentary rules, norms and conventions. Not by their whims," he said.

Frustrated over rushing the committee formation through the Jatiya Sangsad, an opposition legislator said: "It was a session

only to fulfil the constitutional obligation of sitting within 60 days of a session, it was not to deal with important public issues."

The just-concluded session saw only four sittings and formation of 11 parliamentary committees, two of which will need reorganisation due to "inadvertent" mistakes of inclusion of two sitting ministers in committees.

Inclusion of the ministers - state ministers for finance and agriculture -- in public underwriting and public accounts committees was a clear breach of the Rules of Procedure. It made the committees non-functional at birth.

Parliament sources said the treasury bench was not prepared to form the committees, but hurried on it at the sudden instruction by alliance high-ups on the night of May 12 when the House was about to complete the order of the day.

The House was adjourned for 15 minutes to facilitate the ruling party leaders to consult with Speaker Jamiruddin Sircar at his office.

The names were also chosen at that moment, but some top BNP leaders claimed that they were fully prepared to appoint the committees. Moreover, the government could not propose names for all 50 parliamentary standing committees.

Chief Whip Khandaker Delwar Hossain admitted to 'hurried move' in committee formation.

"The mistakes cropped up inadvertently, nothing else," he told The Daily Star on Wednesday. About the next move, he said either the two ministers would resign or the committees would be reorganised.

But, the opposition deputies

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WB to fund water plant in arsenic-hit Chapainawabganj

STAR REPORT

The World Bank (WB) will provide Tk 26.5 crore for setting up a water treatment plant at Chapainawabganj municipality which has the worst arsenic contamination of groundwater in the country.

Officials of the WB and Bangladesh Arsenic Mitigation Water Supply Project (BAMWSP) are now finalising an agreement in this regard.

The plant, to be installed as a BAMWSP project, will treat water from the nearby Mahananda river, a tributary of the Padma, and supply it to about 2.43 lakh consumers at the district town. The decision was taken on the basis of feasibility studies in the last few years.

In phase one of the project, water supply would be raised to 10,000 cubic metres per day from 4,000 cubic metres now. In two years, supply will be raised to 100,000 cubic metres per day. Consumers would then get water supply for 20 hours a day against eight hours at present.

Phase two of the project envisages privatisation of operation and maintenance of the plant and water supply system.

Under the project, water supply network would be expanded to cover the entire 25-square kilometre municipal area. About 40 per cent people of the town now get water supply from the municipality.

Experts testing water samples from deep tube-wells (DTWs) at

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Mystery shrouds Dr Maruf's death

UNB, Comilla

Mystery shrouds the death of Dr Maruf Ahmed, son of former Prime Minister Capt (retd) Mansur Ali and a brother of former home minister Mohammad Nasim.

The body of Dr Maruf, 48, was found in a pond at Bagichagaon in the town Thursday morning. The body, however, bore no injury marks, police said.

Doctors at the Comilla Medical College Hospital who performed autopsy on the body said they were not sure whether it was a natural death or a case of drowning.

However, a UD case was filed with Kotwali thana and the viscera was sent to Dhaka to ascertain the reason behind the death.

On Wednesday, Dr Maruf came to Comilla along with his close friend Shahed Latif and his father M Modabbir from Dhaka and joined a miliad mahfil in Thakurpara area.

Later, Maruf along with Latif went back to the latter's residence at Bagichagaon. Soon after dinner, Maruf went out alone for a walk but

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'Rescue Khosru, punish culprits'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Sitakunda Press Club president Attaur Siddique Khosru, also correspondent of Bengali daily the Ittefaq, could not be traced till yesterday.

Fellow journalists and family members of Khosru have been passing their days amid great anxiety as he has been missing since April 30.

Meanwhile, the minister for water resources and local MP LK Siddiqui went to visit the abducted journalist's family in Sitakunda on Thursday. The minister assured the family members of quick measures to rescue Khosru.

Salimpur union unit of Sitakunda BNP organised a rally at Fouzderhat High School ground on Thursday. The rally, presided over by Kazi Amanat Ullah, demanded exemption of Sitakunda BNP general election results.

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Indian firefighters, left, pour water on the cinder of a fire which broke out on a train at Ladhowal, some 250km northeast of New Delhi, Thursday, in which at least 38 people were burned to death, mostly women and children. A nurse attends an injured train passenger at Christain Medical College (CMC) hospital in Ludhiana.



PHOTO: AFP



Awami League (AL) leaders see off Sheikh Hasina at Zia International Airport Thursday. The AL chief is now on a visit to Europe and the United States.

DOWN TO EARTH

A nation of shopkeepers?

ASM NURUNNABI

The burgeoning growth of shops of various categories in the city is a notable feature of metropolitan life. Here there is no zoning for commercial activities as distinct from residential areas. While in the cities and towns of developed countries, it is not easy to find a shopping centre close to the residential areas, the picture is quite different in Dhaka on account of the absence of zoning of specific areas for specific urban activities. It will not be an exaggeration to say that every day new shops are being opened along lanes, by-lanes, streets and boulevards in the metropolis.

Proliferation of shops in the city is a staggering phenomenon.

The once quiet and select residential areas are not spared from

the rampant commercialisation. A large part of the Dhamondi Residential Area has already been transformed into a commercial hub. The same is the case with Gulshan, Banani and Uttara areas. The most galling feature of the trend is that the big shopping complexes combined with the numerous existing shops at different points contribute to the creation of horrendous traffic jams almost throughout the day.

One may wonder whether the fast growing shops at every conceivable city space are any indication that the purchasing power

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Sampras skips Wimbledon

REUTERS, London

Sampras has fuelled the growing belief that his glittering career is over by pulling out of Wimbledon - the tournament he dominated for a decade.

Sampras, who won the last of his seven singles titles on the All England Club grass-courts in 2000, has not played a match since a fairytale US Open victory last September -- his 14th Grand Slam title.

The 31-year-old American has pulled out of several tournaments this season.

But news that not even another crack at Wimbledon can tempt him out of his inactivity means one of the greatest players ever to grace the game may soon be consigned to history.

"I'm not 100 per cent going to close the door," Sampras, who will

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Prayer Timings

May 15

Azan 4-15

Jamaat 4-50

May 16

5-15 am

6-34 pm

5-15

1-15

5-00

5-15

6-40

6-45

8-00

8-30

Source: Islamic Foundation

38 killed as blaze engulfs crowded train in India

AFP, PTI, Ludhiana

At least 38 people were burned alive when a blaze whipped through packed carriages of an express train near the northern Indian city of Ludhiana early Thursday, catching many in their sleep.

Some of the victims died because baggage blocked exits, rescuers said.

Around 170 men, women and children were trapped in the blaze that swept three of the 15 carriages of the Frontier Mail at 3:45 am (2215 GMT), said officials at the site, 250 kilometres northeast of New Delhi.

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"I'm not 100 per cent going to close the door," Sampras, who will

blockade with luggage and the smoke blinded the terrified passengers," said infantry sergeant A.D. Singh, who along with six other troopers on board the train rescued as many passengers as he could.

Eleven children were among the 38 killed in the fire. Other passengers escaped the inferno by jumping out of windows and smashing open steel doors.

Rescue workers stretched bodies from the smouldering carriages as experts sifted through the gutted coaches for cause of the accident.

Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee said there were reports

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Crackdown on illegal polybag factories soon

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Department of Environment (DoE) will soon clamp down on the increasing number of mushrooming illegal polythene factories in the city.

The DoE, with the help of police and paramilitary forces, will carry out operations against the factories, according to an environment official.

Recently during a joint operation sponsored by the DoE, illegal factories at Lalbagh were sealed off, huge amounts of polythene bags confiscated and the factory owners and employees were arrested.

"Although government has imposed a ban on the production, marketing and use of polythene shopping bags from January 1,

2002, the DoE has not been able to implement the ban effectively," said

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Vessel sinks with imported goods in India

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

A vessel carrying soda-ash worth around Tk 5.5 crore for Bangladeshi importers, including Lever Brothers and Osmania Glass-sheet factory, sank near Haladia port in India yesterday morning.

The Indonesian flag carrier Segi Tiga Biru sailed from Gujarat and was scheduled to arrive at Chittagong this morning (Saturday).

The 104-Meter vessel was caught in a storm and developed a crack in its hatch no. 2 when it came near Haladia port on Thursday evening. The vessel sent an SOS message to the port and a tug-boat went there to help it.

But the vessel could not be saved.

The fate of the crew of the vessel was not known immediately.



Buddhists offer prayers to observe Buddha Purnima, the birth, death and nirvana anniversary of Lord Buddha, at a pagoda in Bashabo Thursday.



PHOTO: STAR